

The Vough Changeable Pitch Piano

**OUR PIANO
IS BACK!**

The Crawford family piano has been lovingly restored, and is ready to be played



JOIN US TO LEARN ABOUT
THIS UNIQUE CHANGEABLE PITCH PIANO,
HEAR THE MUSIC IT CAN MAKE, AND
HAVE SOME REFRESHMENTS

SUNDAY APRIL 28 AT 3PM

WANT TO PLAY IT?
WE ARE INVITING GUESTS TO PLAY A PIECE!
USE THE QR CODE TO SIGN UP OR
EMAIL CRAWFORDHOUSEFRIENDS@GMAIL.COM



With a musical pitch standard available, there became two referred to pitches in the music world: International pitch (A435Hz) and Concert Pitch (some pitch higher than A435Hz).

Last September, I was contacted by the Crawford House Museum to do some restoration and refurbishment work on their unique piano. I was hired to do an evaluation/appraisal on it in 2018, making it a pleasant surprise to hear from them again. I spent a few months straightening the piano out and getting it working again. Most of the work went into new keytops and refurbishing the action parts, but one of the most important tasks was getting the changeable pitch mechanism working again. What is a changeable pitch mechanism and why was it sought after in history? I'm glad you asked.

For many years, there was no pitch standard in music. It was not until the French, a wealthy, industrious nation at the time, formed a committee and decided on a pitch standard which was signed into law by Napoleon III in 1859. This

standard was known as "Diapason Normal" or "International Pitch" and held the frequency of A435Hz. Because it was law, it spread throughout the country and began to bleed out to surrounding areas until a number of countries had adopted it. It even made its way to the USA and can be found stamped inside the piano on certain brands dating from the 1880s to around 1920. With a musical pitch standard available, there became two referred to pitches in the music world: International pitch (A435Hz) and Concert Pitch (some pitch higher than A435Hz).



In January of 1900, William C. Vough patented an invention for a mechanism that shifts the parts inside a piano action to play a semitone higher than if the action were in its normal position. This allowed someone to play C or C#, for example, using the same key just by moving a lever, essentially making it a transposing piano. The transposition mechanism was not intended to make key changes easier though, it was designed to switch between International Pitch and Concert Pitch. When set to low pitch, the piano is tuned to A435Hz and sounds rich and mellow. When the lever is shifted to high pitch (the high pitch referred to as Concert Pitch which comes out to A461Hz on this piano) the piano sounds brighter and is better for faster concert music. This is how the piano was advertised by the Vough Company.

It was very popular for a short time and could be found in a number of theaters. This piano design marks a specific time in history as only about 5,000 pianos were built between 1903 and 1913. The design became obsolete in 1936 when Standard Pitch A440Hz was adopted for all music. You can see how the piano works in this video <https://youtu.be/5-MBBhWstiY?si=Mt55Wv1l6qjKRa5n>

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3:00pm.

My work was completed and the piano was moved back to the Crawford House last January. They are ecstatic to have it back in better shape and playable again. There will be a big unveiling party on April 28th, 2024 at 3:00pm. I will be attending to give some historical background about the piano and answer questions about the piano and its historical context. There will also be pianists attending to play the instrument and explore the unique changeable pitch feature. The last still living of the Crawford children who grew up around this piano will be coming down from Vermont on a special trip specific for the event. There will be refreshments and fun to be had by all and some good music to listen to. If you would like to play the piano during the event, please contact the Crawford House at CRAWFORDHOUSEFRIENDS@GMAIL.COM
I look forward to seeing you there!